

APPENDIX A

Montana State Library Evaluation Library Community Focus Groups

As one element in the “Evaluation of the Montana State Library Long-Range Plan,” Himmel & Wilson, Library Consultants conducted six focus group discussions with librarians and trustees in various locations around Montana. Those sessions were held in Billings, Butte, Great Falls, Miles City, Missoula, and Wolf Point. A total of forty-nine people took part in these discussions.

Two additional sessions were held with Talking Books Library users, one in Billings and one in Helena, with twenty people participating. A summary of these sessions follows the notes from each of the six sessions held with librarians and trustees around the state.

Executive Summary:

Overall the participants praised the Montana State Library (MSL) for its leadership. Participants in sessions on the eastern side of the state tended to be concerned about the ongoing economic health of their region and consequently, the future of their libraries. They tended to stress the need for somewhat different assistance from MSL than libraries in the western portion of the state.

The MSL programs and services seen as having the biggest statewide impact were MSL’s overall leadership, the technology consultants’ assistance with automation and Internet connectivity, MLN’s involvement in negotiating group licensing for online databases and OCLC services, and the continuing education programs for librarians. MSL was praised for providing vision, for lobbying the legislature on behalf of Montana libraries, and for pulling libraries of all types together in common pursuits.

The technology consultants received high praise in all the focus group sessions. Participants, especially those from small libraries, did not think they would have been able to accomplish what they have achieved technologically without the assistance of the technology consultants. Most also felt that the OCLC contract and database licensing would not have happened without the assistance (and push) from MLN and the State Librarian.

Some participants, especially those from eastern Montana, were concerned about the costs of some of the technology related projects and whether they were truly viable in the long term. Several questioned whether OCLC would remain affordable and others expressed the concern that participation in shared automation systems was not realistic for small libraries.

Participants in all the sessions gave high praise for the continuing education experiences provided for librarians in the Summer Institutes, the Fall Workshops, and the special workshops related to ILL.

The programs and services having the biggest impact on individual local libraries were closely related to those with the biggest statewide impact. Participants talked about having the first dedicated Internet connection in their county, about being able to learn how to use the technology they were acquiring, about the leadership provided by MSL with Library Improvement Projects. The technology consultants were “a godsend.” The technology assistance has allowed small libraries to connect to the greater community and has given them “confidence.”

Participants talked specifically about goals 1 and 3 of the Library Development Division. Goal 1 states “All Montana citizens have direct access to information through telecommunications at their libraries.” Almost everyone thought that tremendous progress has been made on this goal. However, some expressed a concern that a few libraries would never be able to provide “direct access to information” at a satisfactory level because of an inadequate telecommunications infrastructure in their area. MSL needs to continue to add databases.

Goal 3 states “Montana citizens are served by librarians and trustees who are knowledgeable about all aspects of library service.” Participants said progress for librarians has been great because of the Institutes, workshops, and Fall Workshops. However, trustee training is still an area that needs lots of attention with sessions being developed by MSL and being delivered locally to trustees. Some discussion centered on being realistic about the ongoing lack of a library school and alternatives for professional training the MSL might support.

In some of the sessions participants talked about progress on the other goals: Smaller libraries have made the most progress on goal 2: “Montana citizens will have timely access to information despite its location or format,” mostly because they did not have access to many resources before MSL emphasized connectivity and the related technologies.

Goal 4 states “Montana citizens know about and value the range of services provided by libraries.” MSL has helped, especially with advocacy with the legislature, but local libraries also have a responsibility. MSL should provide leadership in coordinating marketing by writing canned press releases that can be modified for local library use. More databases are needed, especially agriculture related ones that would be of direct use to farmers and ranchers in eastern Montana. Progress has been made, but “we’re not there yet.”

Goal 5 states “MSL, with federations and local library agencies, will provide leadership to assure that Montana citizens receive excellent library services.” As noted above, MSL leadership received really high marks. Some of the federations were also praised.

Goal 6 states “All Montana citizens have access to library services.” Participants noted a continuing need for accessible buildings and pointed out there were no federal or state funds for building construction.

Goal 7 states “Montana’s students are served by school libraries that meet state standards.” Participants said school libraries in Montana are resource poor. Some didn’t think MSL had made any effort in this area, but others pointed out school libraries weren’t a responsibility of MSL, but rather the job of OPI. However, others noted that MSL was making a real effort to reach out to schools.

Top priorities for the next strategic plan should be current goals 6 and 5. Some people were careful to point out that other goals remain important and that 5 and 6 should be the priorities because there is much more work to be done in these areas. Participants also suggested adding goals for information literacy, resource sharing, coordination among libraries, and legislative information leadership to trustees. Other additions were clarifying the laws and definitions relating to federations and finding a solution to funding problems for rural libraries.

Participants also looked at the goals of the other MSL divisions. They decided the Talking Book Library needs more visibility and better promotion. Some participants also felt that the Natural Resource Information System (NRIS) needs more promotion among librarians, especially in showing library staffs how NRIS services can be useful to them and to their library users. Some participants said the information was being provided at some meetings, but they personally had been too involved with other issues at the time or were intimidated by the complexity of NRIS.

One person suggested that the goals of the Montana Library Network need to be stated in plain English. She asked, “What do Montanaiana, authentication, and authorization mean here (in the MLN goals)?”

There were a few criticisms of MSL. Some participants, particularly in eastern Montana, were concerned that the people at MSL don’t understand libraries serving small, rural populations, nor do they understand the dire financial straits of eastern Montana. In other sessions, librarians thought MSL was too dependent upon federal funds and was not sufficiently supported by the state legislature. People in several sessions criticized Wired Montana as being too gossipy and not sufficiently professional. Some were unhappy that MSL did not have consulting help for children’s librarians and services. Others thought there was too much emphasis on technology and too little on traditional library services in the programs and services provided by MSL.

The pages that follow contain more detail in the form of comments from the discussions at each of the six sites.

Billings Focus Group

What program or activity of the MSL has had biggest impact in the state?

Leadership has been incredibly good; the summer institute and fall workshops have been critical for both new librarians and those who've been in Montana libraries.

The shared resources and the magazine database have helped kids the most.

They've (MSL) been able to use state money as well as LSTA funds more successfully.

What program or activity of the MSL has had biggest impact on your library?

Technology has had a big impact as has having shared resources. LaserCat helps us find what we need and ILL service is faster and better than ever before. When MLN got the OCLC contract we were able to go on-line.

We have had the opportunity to learn to use the technology we've gotten. MSL has changed the mindset of people who work in libraries. Having technology leadership at the State Library has helped us to feel more comfortable with it. MSL has encouraged the multi-type federations.

Would these things have happened without grant funding or statewide initiatives?

We'd still be waiting for an Internet computer for public use.

Many of the smaller libraries wouldn't have access to the periodical articles. (Several mentioned specific databases and digitization projects.)

I'm not really sure our board would have gone along with technology and LaserCat without the additional funds.

What I really like is having Suzanne and Bob Cooper there for help. We wouldn't have the confidence to do things without them. Statewide there wouldn't have been as much e-rate funds; we would just have checked it without their help.

Comments on Goals

Goal 1:

Technology consultants are very important; MSL set a standard—having telecommunications—and then pushed us to do that.

Some of the things that are helpful to small libraries are hurtful to the larger ones. We can find things easier for ILL, but there's still the problem of handling and getting things to requesting libraries.

Goal 2:

A lot of smaller libraries have access to things in other states because of OCLC –full text databases.

Smaller libraries have seen more improvement in this area because we're just now getting what larger libraries have had before.

I'd give this goal a lower rating because of the ILL problems.

Distance is a real issue in Montana; delivery issues remain.

Goal 3:

There's been a real push in the last 4 or 5 years to get good quality CE credit for all of us.

Board education and involvement is really important. The new trustee manual is good.

They've been popular reading trustees...now they're learning more about information.

MSL needs to go out and go more trustee training, especially with districts with elected trustees. MSL has to go to the trustees. Progress on this goal is an "A" for librarians and a "B" for trustees.

MSL has done a good job on legislative information.

The state needs a more meaningful e-mail system, a list serv especially for trustees.

Goal 4:

The range of services is good; MSL has helped local libraries with mil levies; MSL does advocacy with the legislature, but we have a responsibility as well. This is our responsibility; local library needs to get more information out.

Goal 5:

Leadership in last 5 or 6 years has been excellent. You can talk to all the MSL staff.

Bridgit is doing a great job with the federation. "As a trustee I appreciate the MSL's work with the legislature, but I'm not aware of much else that they do. I don't have much of a relationship with MSL."

Goal 6:

Have access, but not an accessible building. Some people have access, but they don't use it.

The standards have pushed libraries to be open more hours.

Goal 7:

It's a joke. School libraries are resource poor. From a higher education standpoint, kids are getting the technology training, but not the book training.

Biggest criticism of MSL?

Automation in small libraries is a problem. No allowance is made for small libraries that can't afford bigger systems.

Some dislike the idea of being so dependent upon OCLC for our Montana catalog.

Miles City

What program or activity of the MSL has had biggest impact in the state? What has had biggest impact on your library?

Internet, automating libraries, funding databases at a very reasonable price. MSL is very good about trying to include all of us. The state technicians teach you to teach others; they're on the phone, fax, Wired Montana all the time. "It's like having a technician in your pocket."

Suzanne Rymer's response time is really great...you never have to wait more than a few hours, even when she's out of the area.

OCLC has been very important...98% hit rate on cataloging and we'd never have been able to afford it ourselves.

INFOTRAC is the biggest thing for us.

I have my criticisms of the statewide library catalog, but it's a great resource.

The Summer Institute is wonderful...a great learning possibility.

Would these things have happened without grant funding or statewide initiatives?

State library has provided leadership in pooling our resources; we'd never been able to do this on our own. Internet wouldn't have happened for years and years.

Comments on the Goals

Priorities for MSL should be generating dollars for libraries and giving it out without strings, and personally visiting each library.

MSL isn't staffed well enough to get to training. Training has to be practical and be delivered to the libraries.

Definitely want to keep the three technology people, and the INFOTRAC databases.

There should be more health components in the statewide databases, more clinical information. Also should be agriculture databases to draw the ranchers in.

The summer institute should be offered for college credit and it should be moved around the state. State should provide some leadership in coordinating marketing, write some canned press releases.

Biggest criticism of MSL?

MSL thinks if you do the project, the money will come...Where are we going to be able to get the money?

I'm afraid that we're getting sucked in, and once you're in it's hard to back out of it (the shared catalog).

They don't seem to get it that the money's not there. We're going through a crucial reorganization of small libraries. Library Districts may save our small libraries.

Behind all of this is the question as to whether the public will spend the money on what we're offering. I'm afraid they're trying to make us tech junkies and that we won't be able to afford it.

To me getting away is a problem for attending the Institute. I wish we could have more things out here. Most of us are happy if they get it as far east as Bozeman.

The MSL should investigate computers from companies that have folded.

The reference line? Who uses it?

The base grants have changed and the new rules are very restrictive.

(Note: one criticism that came up wasn't exactly about MSL: "WLN was more used to working with small libraries...OCLC isn't used to it.")

Overall the comments seemed to be that, other than the technology consultant serving the eastern libraries, nobody at the MSL understood the financial problems that libraries have in eastern Montana. They needed/wanted building grants. They thought LSTA should be changed on the federal level to benefit those who most needed it rather than being based on population. They discussed library districts, but were unsure people in the their area would approve of the concept (The feeling is that the public is against anything that costs money).

Wolf Point

What program or activity of the MSL has had biggest impact in the state? on your library?

Lobbying the legislature; they got us \$400,000 for the databases. The INFOTRAC and LaserCat training programs have been supreme.

Getting the first computers and Internet into libraries. “The State Library has always been there.” “They worked to make sure that every library got Internet access.” The standards are good; give libraries tools.

The Trustee manual is good for librarians and trustees.

The training has been awesome in the last five years; you used to have to go to Helena.

ILL training is making us all consistent.

The technology person has been a godsend.

The County Commissioner didn’t see the need for technology, but when the state offered the grant, that gave me the impetus to ask the City to fund the phone service.

They used to be a wonderful reference source—had an 800 number and they were very good about it.

Comments on the Goals:

Goal 1:

They’re making a real effort; but libraries are still struggling with telecommunications. They (MSL) did help, but it would have been better if they gave me the dollars for the phone line at first.

Goal 2: No comments

Goal 3:

Need to do more helping the trustees learn the laws.

I’m not sure this should be a goal at all.

There’s been one trustee workshop in the six years I’ve been here. There need to be some trustee workshops without the library directors.

As a trustee, I wouldn’t know what the state library does without the federation.

Goal 4:

Montana citizens do value their libraries.

I don't think that Montana people do know about their libraries, but I also think that with decreased income there will be more use of libraries. I think we need more agriculture stuff through INFOTRAC. We're pretty well covered on health issues.

Goal 5:

It would be nice to have more help with marketing. They're doing much better than they did.

Goal 6:

Some libraries are charging for services they shouldn't charge for.

Goal 7:

Don't think they've made any real effort. Personally, I think the state library's purpose isn't to set standards for school libraries.

My point of view is that the state library is for public libraries.

That's OPI's job...MSL has done a good job in taking up the slack.

Priorities for the next five years?

Maintain the federations, but clarify the laws and definitions relating to them.

Clean up the listserv...I took myself off of it because it had a lot of junk on it. Should be more professional and less gossipy.

Priorities should be service to communities.

Figuring out a solution for funding rural libraries should be a priority. MSL could help train us to lobby our commissioners and the people. It's the distribution of the money that's the problem...the money is there, but it's specifically designated for road graders.

Interlibrary loan is very important...I depend upon others for fiction, resource sharing.

Biggest criticism of MSL?

The isolation...I would like a concerted effort to make sure they videotape or video conference any workshop held in Helena.

Most of the MSL staff haven't worked in a one person library; they try to understand, but it's hard because they mostly came from large libraries.

We hadn't ever seen a State Librarian before Karen came. (this was a response to the criticism above about isolation.)

They'd like the LSTA program to be an easy collection development grant instead of a technology grant—just fill in the blanks.

In one-person libraries there isn't time to look for grants, can't the MSL fund a grant writer on staff for a year?

Missoula

What program or activity of the MSL has had biggest impact in the state?

MLN—connectivity, makes you in touch and able to realize some goals.

Statewide database. We're working on a shared catalog, we're seeing results—not just talking.

The statewide technology consultants fit in well with MLN. They're getting libraries online, understanding individual library needs.

I had my doubts about the consultants at the beginning, whether that approach would work. But they're quality people, very accessible, always get back to you when you call.

They're especially helpful in small libraries where director doesn't have a library degree. They're someone to call when you have problems/questions.

The state library has a better vision, a clearer vision of what should be. You see that in the seminars and workshops. I appreciated that the latest workshop (Kalispell conference) was low tech.

We're not seeing much from MLN yet. Only the segment of the library community directly working on MLN is really involved with it at this point.

What program or activity of the MSL has had biggest impact on your library?

Magazine databases are most visible to users. They don't know/care about the background stuff—how we got them.

ILL users are benefiting from the negotiated agreement with OCLC, and earlier from the LaserCat.

LSTA grants allow small libraries to be connected and there's also the push from the state library to get connected. We had no Internet access before that.

We expected the serials database to be a godsend, but the patron survey showed it was the service least known. We're losing people and we don't know why.

We're having the opposite experience, but it's from the individual librarians contacting/talking with people: "did you know you could get that on the database?"

We're losing users too; people are using computers for email, not databases, at the library.

The shared catalog is going to let patrons see we're part of a bigger community.

OCLC has new items on it, that's wonderful. People can get things faster.

InfoTrac is used more by staff to help the public (than being used by the public directly) The public isn't confident enough yet to go right to it.

Would these things have happened without grant funding or statewide initiatives?

There's no way my library would have the INFOTRAC databases if the state hadn't supported it.

Nor would we be online with OCLC. The shared catalog is going to be great.

We've had to struggle with fluctuating budgets that always hit acquisitions. We wouldn't have invested in INFOTRAC without additional support.

The databases let me work with a different clientele. INFOTRAC is much more on the level of what some people can understand. (this is from a special library)

We would have gotten the databases, but having them provided saves us money that we can shift to other things we need. Students also come to us with public library experience in using INFOTRAC now so they're more familiar with resources.

State library's pushing multi-types has made us know each other much better.

We can find out who's got what we want! Cooperation works in both directions: academic library relies on public library to collect in auto manuals, etc. In Missoula we do informal cooperative collection development, in humanities for example. It's a Montana approach for academic and publics to cooperate. It's a real bargain for the community. In Kalispell, he buys the "dull, but worthy books" and I buy the frivolous, but delicious stuff!

From having east-coast special library experience I can tell you, Montana is different; networking is really good here. Some communities are better than others, but... And it's all because of the state library."

Goals and comments:

Goal 1:

Missoula has a small branch that has public Internet access now,--access is really expanded. In 1997 we had no Internet access. All of us who work there would have been helpless without the state library training on it all.

I came from Idaho where there were lots of competitive LSCA grants, I was dismayed how much stayed at the state library here.

I'm glad the state library has a plan, dollars aren't just being sucked into the State Library. The technology consultants are a good example.

Some tiny libraries still don't have Internet access; a few still don't have telephones. It's still a worthy goal. There's an infrastructure problem in MT: Sprint ads say you can get high speed service anywhere, but no, you can't!

We can't link with a branch because the lines to there are so poor. And, a lot of this is outside the state library's hands.

Goal 3:

There are a lot of librarian training and opportunities, but we still have some to go for trustees. One trustee who went said it was good, but only one from each library in a federation was funded to go. Some are teachers and can't get substitutes so they can go.

I was on standards committee...liked how the state library said these aren't meant to be punitive. Karen said it's the state library's responsibility to see that libraries meet these. It's nice to see they have a plan and that implementation is at work.

The week long Institute is great

Still need more with trustees.

Our trustees aren't like school trustees who are mandated to attend workshops and education sessions.

Some trustees think anyone can be a librarian; they wouldn't have agreed to be trustees if they had known the responsibilities that trustees truly have.

At the Lamar meeting there was one trustee from each library; there needs to be a session that's for all trustees in a federation for a day.

The standards committee talked about requiring trustee workshop attendance, but didn't make that a standard.

We have no library school, nor the money to attract one. Have to keep our expectations and requirements realistic.

The Montana Library Association provides some money for scholarships.

I have a trustee (the mayor) who used to be against the state library. Now he even testified at the legislature in support of state library.

The fellowship (of the federation) and the workshops have been wonderful.

Summer Institute is fabulous. I thought of “those people at the state library,” now I’m comfortable in calling them. There’ll never be an MLS in my community unless they’re independently wealthy.

Do the continuing education activities and workshops that are offered conflict/compete with each other?

State library employees are on state library association board, so there’s lots of cross-pollination. That keeps everyone in the know.

Once in a while there are conflicts—things scheduled too closely together, but there probably aren’t enough continuing education programs.

There’s distance education from Arizona. I looked into it, but when it got here, we didn’t need it. I decided I wouldn’t get any more money (for having higher degree), so there wasn’t any incentive to take it. So I just keep my teaching certificate current.

Somebody at Kalispell conference also brought up the state library’s voluntary certification.

Other ideas from Kalispell: There wasn’t much in tech services available and there’s the whole paraprofessional issue—now there’s an interest group for this. Tech services people need to get together more often, maybe along with the fall workshop.

Session for paraprofessionals has to be at a different time so that someone can keep the library open.

Voluntary certification isn’t really worth the bother.

Things need to be close to home, interesting, and related to your work. Needs to be something for specific areas (tech services, reference, etc.)

Maybe traveling workshops, going from federation to federation. Do within a federation but have participants from all types of libraries so they can make connections with each other.

Academics need the training too, support staff especially.

Maybe MSL could arrange for us to take college courses (related to libraries/literature) but not for a degree. Maybe explore distance learning in Montana.

Biggest criticism of MSL?

I don't want the State Library to be so dependent on federal dollars; want better entitlement in Montana, so the state library doesn't have to beg for funds.

Technology consultants should be paid from the state—tried that this year but failed.

Our problems aren't well known by the legislature, we aren't "squeaky" enough. They think we "get by as it is, nothing's broken."

I like having competitive grants, but only bigger libraries have staff who have time and skills to write grants.

The Senator from Thompson Falls is impressed by the State Library!

State Library effort this year was good at getting information to legislators on issues.

I don't feel negative about the state library and that's a change! Some decision making IS going on, there's real professionalism and progress there. Makes you feel you understand what's going on and that you're a part of it.

The school librarian at Kalispell complained to me about postings on the listserv—state library's not buying any books for them. Problem is that OPI isn't making things available for them!

Do the MSL priorities seem to be the right ones for Montana?

I don't know about NRIS

They talk about NRIS in the reports, but I "zone out," don't understand what we could tap into. Seems really complex.

Talking books is a vulnerable area. Goal 2 there is being met—users tell me they get good, quick service. Having the state library recording old Montana books into talking books is a splendid use of dollars.

I like that they (TBL) handle it all themselves. All we have to do is turn in names to TBL.

Goal 1 should be goal for all libraries everywhere.

NRIS must provide excellent information, we just need another workshop on how to use it. School and public libraries, even health libraries could use their information. Problem is it gets lumped in with MLN, etc. in the reporting and you tend to ignore it.

What do you see as future directions? What should be addressed in the next strategic plan?

State library in Idaho provided professional development grants, they paid up to \$1500/person, you had to come back and provide a workshop on what you learned. That would be a good thing to do here because it wouldn't be a big library/little library issue. There should be a chunk of money for this.

Projects are so time consuming to write.

Maybe the goals and priorities need to be set in terms of reaching, say, 92% done, then we move on to new goals. Some libraries are never going to get it. Moving on would free up some dollars for something different

Need STATE funding for things!

The shared catalog is a marvelous use of federal dollars; it's regional rather than statewide, but still bigger than one library.

Training has to have a higher priority, so does coordination/facilitation among libraries of different types. Academics in public institutions have community service as a requirement. State library should be active in hammering out coordination among types of libraries. Define more the role of multi-types; give academics more responsibility.

In the future plan the MSL should maintain tech consultants, MLN, and technology. Don't let those disappear, but at some point MSL should move toward supporting more coordination among types of libraries.

Maybe fund an itinerant cataloger for special things?

Priorities should be to continue the technology stuff, sustain and train.

Butte

What program or activity of the MSL has had biggest impact in the state?

Technology consultants have been a real boon; they hold hands and trouble shoot.

MLN has helped—access to holdings for students.

LISD—University is state docs depository and LISD has made significant changes in that. Documents are more accessible in the depository system. LISD is in transition, but is making people aware of state docs.

Ongoing continuing education has been important: 2 fall conferences and week-long Institute.

Statewide licensing agreements: databases and OCLC. LaserCat was good at the beginning when it was WLN, but WLN wasn't as big at OCLC. OCLC is a major improvement.

Licensing for INFOTRAC and OCLC have happened because of MSL's political efforts, being our voice in the legislature; they (MSL staff) do a good job in both directions (legislature and librarians)

Prior to 1997 there was no unity in pulling people together—it's a terrific way to use resources; MSL has pulled that off. Also has been trying to pull academic/school/public libraries together.

What program or activity has had the biggest impact on the users of your library?

Our library benefited from getting the Internet line. It was first one in the county. Then we had a library improvement project in Madison County. That has brought us together, including the Harrison area. Resource sharing has benefited us all.

Technology consultants have been a tremendous help—with e rate, etc. "They walk us across every bridge."

We got a \$40,000 LIP grant to consolidate. We were really impressed with the help we got. Bob Cooper and Karen gave us lots of help. We'll keep working on it.

Would these things have happened without grant funding or statewide initiatives?

Access wouldn't have happened without the federal dollars. There are 18 big libraries, but all the rest serve under 5,000 people and the small ones wouldn't have had Internet.

Databases would have happened eventually. State library would eventually have had to have technology staff.

MLN: resource sharing wouldn't have happened—MSL got the idea going. There's so much politics in local communities, they're afraid to share with non-residents.

The LIP (Library Improvement Project) and tech grant—no way we would have been able to do that. We're in such a wide geographic area.

The direct line has made a huge difference. We tried before and couldn't get there. The Ruby part of the Valley is poorer than the Ennis area...MSL brought us all together.

Because of the grants INFOTRAC is available indirectly in my special library.

Biggest impact has been in ILL.

MSL is our political voice. I'm grateful someone else in taking on the politics. Libraries need unity, someone speaking out for us. "I need a bigger voice."

A lot has come to Montana libraries since 1997. Large libraries get more local funds (so they're "richer", but not so on a per capita basis. Large libraries have needs too.

Our patrons demand Internet. That's what they come into our library for. (a small library)

Many of us are confused about where LSTA funds go. Prior to Wired MT the federal funds went into individual grants. It's worrisome because in Wyoming the state legislature wouldn't pick up funding because the state library had access to federal grants

Almost all the LSTA funds stay with MSL. In the beginning local libraries got funds. The issue is whether small libraries do better because of enriched statewide resources...

There are a wide variety of needs in MT. Health library has technology, but has trouble getting it to work. Other libraries don't have the technology to begin with. It's important that the state library is aware of that conflict. We're all changing quickly, so it's important that there's someone looking out toward the future. Schools need help too—that's a whole new issue. Lots of things could be coordinated. Health libraries could help public libraries with health questions.

Keeping the federal funds at the State Library isn't a bad solution for the present. Isolated librarians now have a place to go.

If they sent the federal money all out to libraries, we wouldn't be able to purchase as much. (Two people in the group still said they would like funds available for innovative grants. Their complaint was that there's no room for any vision other than that of the MSL at present.)

Large libraries should be able to try innovative things. We did a shared catalog, which was very expensive, on our own before the state library decided that was a good idea.

A disproportionate amount of money has gone/is going into MLN.

On our campus we have the technical support that other libraries don't.

Goals and comments:

Goal 1:

Prior to 1997 we had one computer. My board didn't see the need.
We have Gates to credit as well, not just MSL.

This goal has been achieved, but it was Gates funds that did it. (LSTA did put lines into libraries before '97. Since '97 it has been a different story)

In '94 most small public libraries had no Internet access. All MT citizens is a pretty lofty goal; there isn't any way we can reach some remote folks.

It depends on what part of Goal 1 you emphasize. We do need to continue to add databases, especially full text. Do need to offer more.

Goal 3:

The Fall conference and Institutes go a long way.

Would like MSL to do as Utah does—provide more trustee workshops and training.

Training needs to come to the trustees, from the state level. Trustees are volunteers—important to go to them. They wouldn't go to a camp!

This goal will never be met!

Trustees expect librarians to lead them, to do the work. They aren't in a position to know if there are other possibilities in solving problems, in setting directions.
(the trustee in the group agreed: important that the state library come to the trustees.)
Then we could depend on the trustees more.

We don't have enough personnel so I don't have time to keep up professional development myself.

My trustees need more legal assistance from the state library.

There also needs to be some way of making city and county officials more knowledgeable about library responsibilities.

Biggest criticism of MSL?

I'd like more help for children's librarians and services. There is no one at MSL to do that. Others agreed—important to balance traditional library things with technology support.

Shared services are fine, technology is here to stay, but I have a problem sometimes with the over emphasis on technology. "We're afraid to be behind."

We need to look at user demand and needs. Computers take up space that used to be used for public tables.

MLA has taken over children's programming and is a tremendous success, but it's also a lot of work for MLA to be carrying.

MSL needs to look at what's working/not working in the state. All of us are losing funds and personnel. The role of the state library isn't to serve just public libraries. Public libraries are cooperating. Cooperation is our survival. State library needs to coordinate that for all libraries.

We need more from MSL for children's and YA. Missoula Public does the states' YA advocacy!

What's your assessment of the way the LSTA program is administered?

I don't know how the state library decides how to spend funds—would be interesting to know about those decisions.

I don't have a feel for how federations fit in. The federation trustees voted to spend funds for MSL?

Are the priorities in the Long Range Plan the right ones?

Cooperation/coordination with all libraries should be top goal.

In 3.5 years as director I've never talked to anyone at TBL, NRIS, or LISD...they're not reaching out to local public libraries at all!

Whether you know about TBL depends upon whether you have patrons who use it. NRIS Goal 3 especially: nobody at the public library has a clue on how to use it. If they looked at it they'd be overwhelmed. The professionals who use it depend on it and we don't interface at all. Or, there are lots of people who would use it if they could.

We use it extensively. (Academic librarian)

We tend not to go to their workshops because there are other things we need more. Patrons aren't demanding it.

TBL focus is internal? It really should be more broadly known.

How do NRIS and LISD fit together?

I want to be sure access to information is access to reliable information. That should be in the goals of MLN somewhere, some emphasis on information literacy.

What should the top two priorities be for the next plan?

Information literacy, not just access to data.

Coordination among various types of libraries; balancing the disparity between technology and traditional library services and programs.

Resource sharing and children's services expertise

Resource sharing expertise and the statewide catalog

State online catalog and coordination with other state agencies

Resource information and more access to NRIS

Outreach consultant who helps with a variety of problems or issues and then moves on to another federation or area

Information literacy and cooperation; we all need to access the resources of rich special libraries.

Continued outreach to bring libraries up to standards in all areas

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

I hate that there's no construction funding available.

There are problems with complete transition to technology –where are you going to put those new computers in your crowded old building.

Need recognition that buildings are aging, that we're outgrowing our space
When you call the state library, they don't know where there are any building grants.

Karen Strege is an incredible leader. She showed vision with the LIP projects. She's drawing libraries together and representing us well.

Sue Jackson is always optimistic and makes things work.

Great Falls

What program or activity of the MSL has had biggest impact in the state? What has had biggest impact on your library?

The three technology consultants, our library hasn't used them, but they're really important.

We called Sue Jackson lots of times to get our network going (hardware); John Finn helped too.

The statewide contract for INFOTRAC databases has helped all of us, academics included.

Consultants' help with e-rate was very important.

The state pushed technology on us whether we wanted it or not; don't know if we would have done it otherwise. I said NO!, we still laugh about that. (She was one of biggest proponents on how wonderful things are.) Now I'm proud of it! Part of problem was not knowing where to go for help.

Space is a problem in small libraries (and academic libraries too) Computers take room. We have a 10 station computer room—are really having a good year. Also have an IMLS grant (Native American—not LSTA) to set up a lab and do retro.

The Cascade County Historical Society and public library applied and were turned down for a grant 2 years ago—digitization grant went to Bozeman instead.

Would these things have happened without grant funding or statewide initiatives?

It might have happened, but it would have been painful. Our local funders weren't real accepting, didn't trust those people. State has helped in getting us all on the same systems.

At the college we push technology, but at the local public library (Harlem) I don't think they would have the technology at all.

What progress has been made in reaching goal 1: All citizens have direct access...through telecommunications?

Definite progress, look at the e-rate; INFOTRAC.

We've gotten Gates grants too; that's not LSTA, but the state library facilitated it all. There's been a big push from State library to get Internet access into every public library in the state. They've done a good job in getting people to help.

What progress has been made in reaching goal 3: Citizens served by librarians and trustees ...knowledgeable about all aspects of library service?

Federation has workshops; Summer Institute; MLA training; Fall retreat; Trustee training manual.

The two trustees in the session hadn't participated in any training provided by MSL. One thought the state library was more interested in the library directors.

The manuals are helpful, but it's hard to get trustees involved. Many don't want to deal with issues.

MSL doesn't really know who all the trustees are. There are 3 libraries in Choteau County, so why aren't there three packets here to be delivered? (Note: consultant was delivering the trustee manuals for MSL.)

All my trustees work, so they can't attend things.
(A director) thought a one-day workshop for trustees every year was necessary, because somebody's term ends every year and someone new comes on board. Hold this within the federations. Maybe do video training, while not perfect, that would be better than nothing.

Big time! The trustees don't know what they're doing!

There are things for them at the federation meetings, but even there they aren't spending time on how important trustees are.

It takes a year to learn what to do as a trustee.

You just had to learn by watching the others when you were new.

You can be on the board only 10 years!

Only two of my trustees come regularly to meetings.

Pathfinders has a committee on continuing education for librarians.
Federations do training for certification.

Boards in general (outside the library world) don't get much training.
Some people come onto the library board just because it looks good on their resume (one librarian related that a young board member had told her that)

Our board here at Great Falls is pretty good (about attendance).

Biggest criticism of MSL?

Problems are logistic...if you're in a one-person library, you can't get away for things.

There's a missing goal—it's the duty of the state library to get information out. We (trustees) got no direction from the state library on how various legislative bills would impact libraries. It all went out on Wired Montana to directors and missed trustees.

Karen does give legislative updates at federations meetings.

Comments on Goals:

Two participants thought Goal 2 (...timely access...despite location or format) should be the first priority.

Goal 4: Montana citizens know about and value the range of services provided by libraries.

MSL should do more PR packaging that can be used by all libraries.—canned presentations on e-rate for example, things we could put in our local newspapers.

That doesn't work in our town. In our small town we have to pay to put things in the newspaper! We have a "What's new at the library" column, but we have to pay for it.

All the goals are worthwhile, but Goal 4 hasn't been reached yet.

What do you think should be the top two priorities in the next strategic plan?

First priority:

Five said (current goal 6), All Montana citizens have access to library services.

One each said current goal 4: Montana citizens know about and value the range of services provided by libraries; goal 2: Montana citizens will have timely access to information despite its location or format; and goal 5: MSL, with federations and local library agencies, will provide leadership to assure that Montana citizens receive excellent library services.

Second priority:

Five of them said (current goal 5), MSL, with federations and local library agencies, will provide leadership to assure that Montana citizens receive excellent library services.

One each said current goal 4: Montana citizens know about and value the range of services provided by libraries; goal 2: Montana citizens will have timely access to information despite its location or format; and goal 6: All Montana citizens have access to library services.

Are there other, additional goals that should be added?

Legislative information leadership—getting to trustees as well as directors. Would carry more weight with the legislators if it were the trustees speaking rather than the directors.

Look at goals of other divisions, agencies within state library, what do you know about these?

TBL—a couple knew about its services

Are hearing about it less and less these days; isn't being publicized as much as it was.

There's a misconception that it's different; has nothing to do with us.

NRIS—they had a workshop at MLA (Kalispell); also set up at legislative day. Maybe need a poster or something like that for display at public libraries (for public awareness) TBL and NRIS are prime candidates for PR.

Professionals actively involved with the environment know about NRIS. (The librarians in the group thought this was true.)

MLN

These goals need translation into English! (reaction to these was strong) Goal 2 needs some explanation! Hi-Line is in 1, 2, and 3 here, but you'd never know it. Have to use less technical terms if we want people to be interested in what's happening. "Should we really have a statewide catalog? How important is that really? We couldn't afford to mail things around anyway!"

In Great Falls at patron at home can get into the Gateway, order books on ILL, but the librarians see the request before it goes on. (this was in response to two people in the group, one in particular, who wasn't so sure all the resource sharing was a good idea. She said she needed those things at home for her own patrons.)

One participant didn't want to share resources.

Many are still on LaserCat.

Some aren't automated.

There's nothing for Winnebago (stand alone automation system) libraries on the shared catalog.

One person asked, "What do Montanaiana, authentication, and authorization mean in the Goals?"